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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHSQ/AMEMBASSY SKOPJE PRIORITY 1144

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 000152

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: NO INVITATION FOR MACEDONIAN CHURCH LEADERS TO
GREEK ARCHBISHOP'S FUNERAL

REF: ATHENS 147

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Jeff Hovenier
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (U) This message has been cleared by Embassy Skopje.

2. (C) After news emerged Wednesday that leaders of the Macedonian Orthodox Church intended to attend the funeral liturgy of Greek Archbishop Christodoulos in Athens on Thursday, Greek Church authorities declared that the Macedonians were not welcome and the Greek government denied visas. While appearing to be yet another example of petulance, the Greek stance reflects the long-standing ecclesiastical non-recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church by the entire Orthodox world. Additionally, given the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch, it was canonically impossible for the hierarchy of the Macedonian Church to attend. Church observers note there is no history of official communication between the Churches and to expect the funeral of Christodoulos to serve as the basis for the same would be disingenuous. Macedonian Orthodox Church leaders see the incident in much the same way, as the continuation of a long-standing denial of their existence. End Summary.

3. (C) On Wednesday, January 30, Macedonian press reported that the Macedonian Orthodox Church intended to send a delegation to the funeral of Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos, who died on Monday. The Macedonian press portrayed this as a good-neighborly gesture, but the Greek liaison office denied visas to the delegation on grounds that the Macedonian Church leaders were never invited to the funeral. The Greek Orthodox Church considers their non-recognition of the existence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church to be appropriate grounds for not inviting them. The Macedonians felt that no invitation was needed for paying respects at a funeral service. Representatives of other churches were invited to participate in the service and in attendance were officials of the Roman Catholic, Coptic, and Anglican churches as well as several of the Muftis of Thrace representing Islam.

4. (C) The Serbia Orthodox Church, a close ally of the Greek Orthodox Church, has maintained for decades that the Macedonian Orthodox Church is a schismatic church, is a part of the Serbian Orthodox Church and that the Macedonian Orthodox Church buildings, people and priests all belong to the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church. All Orthodox Churches throughout the world (as well as the Ecumenical Patriarch) adhere to this teaching.

5. (C) By way of analogy, in the United States, there exists the Orthodox Church of America (OCA), which is not recognized by either the Greeks or the Ecumenical Patriarch as an

autocephalous Orthodox Church. Instead, it is considered to be a part of the Russian Orthodox Church (even though the Russians recognize the autocephalous nature of the OCA). (NOTE: The OCA is to be distinguished as separate and apart from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, headed today by Archbishop Demetrius. End note.) Like the Macedonian Orthodox Church, no invitation was extended to the "apostates" who today control the so-called Orthodox Church of America. It should also be noted that, historically, there has never been any official communication between either the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Church of Greece (although, unofficially, there were at least three meetings between Christodoulos and Macedonian Orthodox Church leaders) or between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarch.

16. (C) COMMENT: Greek observers suggest that Macedonian Orthodox Church officials had to have known that it was canonically impossible for them to participate as it was publicly announced before Christodoulos' death that he had requested the Ecumenical Patriarch to officiate at his funeral liturgy. Canonically, Orthodox Church officials (of all variants) are prohibited from celebrating liturgy with members of the hierarchy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (or leaders of any church considered to be schismatic). Public plans by Macedonian Orthodox Church leaders to attend the funeral, therefore, appeared disingenuous to Greek eyes.
SPECKHARD